A

SERMON

Concerning

God's Deferring to anſwer Mens Prayers:

Preached before the

King and Queen

AT

WHITE-HALL,

November the 11th 1694.

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St. Matthew *Ch.* XV. *V.* 28.

Then Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto her, O Woman great is thy Faith; Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt. And her Daughter was made whole from that very hour.

CONſidering the very precarious and depending State of Humane Nature, what infinite Variety of Miſeries and Wants we are all ſubject to, and how Weak and Unable the very Greateſt of us are to ſupply thoſe Wants, or prevent thoſe Miſeries, or even to ſuſtain our ſelves under either: Man muſt needs be of all Creatures the moſt Diſconſolate and Forlorn, were there not ſome higher and better Refuge, than his own Strength and Wiſdom, provided for him to have recourſe to. Our Maker therefore, who beſt knew our Neceſſities, hath commanded us to take Sanctuary in his Good Providence, and expreſſed the Tendereſt Care of us. He hath directed that we ſhould *pour out our Hearts before him*, and *ſhew him all our Trouble*; and hath encouraged the Performance of this Duty, with Gracious Promiſes

of Pity and Redreſs, and a Conſtant Readineſs to hear, and help, and do, as He ſees moſt expedient for us. But becauſe His Thoughts are not always as Our Thoughts, and the Love of a Father is tempered with the Wiſdom of a God; from hence it comes to paſs, that many times what we ask is not granted at all; and at other times it is not granted ſo ſoon as we deſire and expect it. Now in order to the compoſing our Minds under ſuch Delays and Diſappointments as theſe, that we may not raſhly ſuſpect God of Unfaithfulneſs to his Word, it is neceſſary to conſider the Reaſons of thoſe Diſpenſations to us. And Reaſons there always are, did we but duly attend to them, abundantly ſufficient to convince us, that neither is He Unjuſt or Unkind, nor we neglected or forgotten.

The abſolute Denial of our Prayers is capable of an eaſie Reſolution, becauſe we often *ask* Matt. vii 9,10. *Stones inſtead of Bread*, and *Serpents inſtead of Fiſhes*. That is, We miſtake our own Good, and do not ſee far enough into the Nature and Conſequences of things, and muſt therefore in reaſon look upon it as an Act of Kindneſs to be denied. Since our Father denies us, only becauſe he loves us, and becauſe he underſtands better,

better, and chooſes better for us than we do for our ſelves.

But why thoſe things which are really for our Advantage, and are at length given us, becauſe they are ſo; why Theſe, I ſay ſhould yet be with-held, even when our Neceſſities are preſſing; why thoſe Supplications, which are themſelves acceptable, ſhould yet be rejected and diſcountenanced for a Seaſon, and the Anguiſh of our Souls increaſed by ſad Repulſes: This ſeems to carry ſomething more of Difficulty in it. For in ſuch a caſe it is natural enough for a Man to argue thus in his own Breaſt. "If the ſubject of my Petitions be "not for the Glory of God, and my own Good, "then is it not proper for him to grant, or me "to receive at all; and the moſt Solicitous "Application will not, ought not to obtain it. "But if it conduce to both theſe two Great Ends, "(as to be ſure it does one way or other, be-"cauſe it is granted at laſt) why does not then "this Divine Father haſten the Felicity of his "Children? Why dces not his Goodneſs double "the Favour, by giving ſpeedily, what his "Wiſdom ſees fit to give, though later, and "more ſlowly?

That

That this is ſometimes the Method of God's Dealings with Mankind, is particularly manifeſt from the moſt remarkable Inſtance of a Canaanitiſh Woman, deſcribed here at large from the One and twentieth Verſe, to that of my Text incluſively: She intreated no Trifling or unneceſſary Favour, but one, upon which the whole Quiet and Happineſs of her Life depended; the Cure of a Child in a moſt de-
Verſe 22. plorable Condition; a Child whom an Evil Spirit had got ſtrong Poſſeſſion of, and tormented to that degree, that the Agonies of any common Sickneſs had been a Bleſſing in compariſon; and the loſs of her by a Natural Death, a moſt welcome Releaſe from inſupportable Miſery and Pain. The diſtorted Limbs, the violent Convulſions, the ſudden Throws and Pangs, the Terrors and Diſtractions of them who labour and languiſh under theſe Poſſeſſions, are more Diſmal than words can expreſs, and a Spectacle too Gaſtly and Aſtoniſhing for Humane Nature to bear. If the Greatneſs of any Calamity could enforce Compaſſion, what Misfortune could have a better right to it than this? And who generally more apt to commiſerate any Affliction, than the Tender and the Loving
Matt. viii. 5, 6, 7. *Jeſus?* When the Centurion beſought him in behalf of his Servant only, he met his Deſires

half

half way; and immediately replied, *I will come and Heal him.* But here a wretched Mother comes, whoſe Soul was quite overwhelmed with Paſſion; ſhe ſuffers in and for her Daughter, feels all her Tortures, is ſhaken and oppreſs'd by all her Phrenſies and violent Agitations, dies every Moment afreſh under all her Tearings and Foamings, and is pierced through with every cutting Shreek and Groan; all Nature works within her, and ſhe throws her ſelf at his Feet with all that Diſorder and Perplexity of Heart, which none but Mothers know, none but Tender and Afflicted Mothers can make any tolerable gueſs at. And yet this otherwiſe kind Maſter, contrary to his Cuſtom, ſeeks cruel Excuſes to put her off. She purſues him from place to place, allows him no leiſure to harden in, but melts him down with Tears, and deafens him with repeated Cries and Complaints. His Diſciples themſelves could hold out no longer, Verſe 23. but turn Interceſſors for her; ſo Troubleſome it ſeems was her Importunity, or ſo very moving her Affliction. Yet ſtill HE Relents not, but Verſe 25, 26. with a ſeeming Barbarity upbraids her Unworthineſs of his Help, and her Confidence in expecting it. She takes the Hint, and urges him Verſe 27. again and again, her Clamours and her Calamities will have no Denial, and then he yields

at

at laſt, and pleaſed to be thus vanquiſhed, applauds and rewards her unwearied Zeal; does, as it were, delegate a Power to her to work the Miracle her ſelf; makes her the Diſpoſer of his Gift, and the Carver of her own Fortunes. Verſe 28. *Then Jeſus anſwered, and ſaid unto her, O Woman, great is thy Faith, Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt.* And as ſhe deſired, ſo it was moſt effectually, ſhe only begged that her Daughter might be reſtored to her ſelf, and the whole Force of Hell was no longer ſtrong enough to reſiſt her, for *her Daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

The ſeveral Steps taken in this Proceeding, and the manner of granting at laſt, in ſuch comprehenſive Terms, and with ſo peculiar a Character of the Petitioners Virtue, give us great reaſon to conclude, that, as the firſt Refuſals were not out of any real Unkindneſs, ſo the following Compliance was either occaſioned, or enlarged however, by means of that Faith, which our Lord ſo highly extols. And then the moſt effectual Courſe to anſwer the Deſign of this whole Paſſage, both with regard to the particular Caſe before us, and to our own Prayers in general, of which this Caſe is ſet here as a Pattern, will be to treat of the Words under the Three following Heads.

I. *Firſt,*

I. *First*, To assign some Reasons why God delays the giving what we ask for some time, though he do not intend absolutely and altogether to with-hold it from us.

II. *Secondly*, To show what Qualifications are requisite in our Prayers, to render them Effectual and Successful, notwithstanding, and after such Delays. And,

III. *Thirdly*, To consider how God's being wrought upon by Prayers so qualified, is consistent with the standing Order of Providence, and the Unchangeableness of the Divine Nature and Counsels.

I. First, *I am to render some account, why God delays the giving what we ask for some time, though he do not intend* (as the Event of this Story plainly proves) *absolutely and altogether to with-hold it from us.* And of this we may gather two very substantial Reasons from the Case now under our Consideration.

1. The first is, *That these Delays enhance and add to the Blessing, when we do at last receive it.* The Satisfaction Men take in what they possess is not always proportioned, either to the real Value of the Things themselves, or the Want

the Perſons have of them; or the Advantages they reap from them, but depends chiefly upon the Senſe and Diſpoſition of their own Minds. The moſt valuable Enjoyments are ſometimes utterly loſt and thrown away, becauſe they are ſlighted and over-look'd. Our Neceſſities are not always duly underſtood, and when they are not ſo, the moſt ſeaſonable Reliefs will be ſure to fall very low in our Eſteem. So that to give a true reliſh to any Happineſs, the principal and moſt neceſſary Work, is to poſſeſs the Soul with a right Notion of its Indigent State, and the urgent occaſion we have for it. And according to this Notion our Reſentments will be more or leſs Grateful, and the Gift more or leſs Welcome, when we have attained it. This ſeems to be the very Reaſon, why thoſe Bleſſings, which lye in common to all the World, are ſo little ſet by; becauſe ſcarce any body conſiders the Benefit of That, which is open and eaſie to every body. It comes without our Seeking, and therefore it paſſes by without our Obſerving too. The Sun ſhines alike on the Evil, and on the Good; and the Rain deſcends as liberally on the Unjuſt as on the Juſt. The kindly returns of Day and Night, and Heat and Cold, ſeem to be fix'd by Laws of Nature, and are uſually tempered in Order

Matt. v. 45.

and

and Meaſure. And though the Advantage of theſe things be Unſpeakable, yet becauſe it is Univerſal and Uniform, we grow wanton in the Enjoyment, and are but very lightly affected with the Convenience of them to us. And if this be the Condition of thoſe Bleſſings that are abſolutely neceſſary to preſerve the World, and ſuſtain this Life, of which we are ſo immoderately fond; how much more may we be expected to diſeſteem thoſe others, that are only Additional Comforts, and tend not to the Support, ſo much as the Delight of Mankind?

Herein then is One great Good of Afflictions, ſuch as juſtifies both the Wiſdom and the Kindneſs of God in appointing them, that they help us to diſcern ſomething particular in our own caſe, and awaken us into a Senſe of our Wants, and by the Deliverance recommend God's Goodneſs infinitely more to us, than uninterrupted Proſperity could ever have done. Health is the ſame in it ſelf when conſtant, as when reſtored; and Preſervation the very ſame, when nothing hath threatned our Safety: But yet every Man naturally entertains a Recovery from Sickneſs, and an Eſcape from Danger, with a more Senſible Pleaſure, than if thoſe Difficulties had never happened to him, and

feels his Soul more powerfully wrought upon to be Thankful, than if he had never found occaſion to fear or to complain at all. And all This ſeems to depend upon One Cauſe, which is, That in this Body we lead Lives of Senſe, as well as Reaſon; and cannot therefore conſider things always Abſtractedly, and as they are in their own Nature, but muſt judge of them as they appear to us. And thoſe Appearances are generally but Cold and Feeble, except ſome viſible Change of our Affairs alter the preſent Habit of our Minds, and leave a ſtrong and lively Impreſſion upon us. And then the longer ſuch Impreſſions laſt, the lower we are reduced, and the greater the Alteration is, the better ſtill ſhall we taſte and value that Mercy, which reſtores us to our former Eaſe and Happineſs again.

Now if this be the Condition of thoſe things which make the Subject of our Prayers, it muſt needs be ſo with our Prayers themſelves too. For One great End of Praying, is to publiſh our Wants, and to ſeek Relief and Supplies ſuitable to them; to bewail our Miſeries, and to implore the Divine Favour and Aſſiſtance. And becauſe this is ſometimes done coldly, and of courſe only, God holds his Hand till we feel the Smart; and are brought to a due ſight of our Circum-

Circumſtances, by being pinched under them. Thus he aggravates and prolongs our Sorrows, 'tis true; but withall he magnifies the Mercy, which turns our Heavineſs into Joy: A Joy, that we ſhould either not have felt, or have felt but very ſlightly, if the Deliverance had prevented, or met our firſt Wiſhes, and the Burden had never gauled, or weighed us down at all. So neceſſary is it, according to the preſent Conſtitution of Humane Nature, that Men ſhould be taught Wiſdom at their own Expence; and that God ſhould ſometimes reſtrain the Overflowings of his Bounty for our Good: That ſo by hindring his Bleſſings from becoming Eaſie, he may prevent that greater Miſchief, the Sin of their becoming Cheap and Contemptible to us.

This ſingle Conſideration of working us up to a right Apprehenſion, and a juſt Eſtimate of the Benefits Prayer obtains for us, is ſufficient to acquit God of any Unkindneſs, and reconcile us to all the Difficulties and Delays we can meet with from him. He gives as he pleaſes, and he knows beſt when, as well as what to give. He defers not becauſe he grudges the Gift, but only waits the moſt proper Seaſon, that he may give when it will be moſt Acceptable, and when

when we are beſt prepared to Receive, and to Reliſh, and to Improve by the Favour.

But yet this is not all: For when I ſay, that ſuch Delays add to the Bleſſing, my meaning is, not only that they heighten it in our Opinion, but that they add to it in Reality, and procure us a greater Plenty and Proportion. For Prayer being a Duty which God hath commanded, and wherein he delights, the very performing it as we ought, gives us a freſh Title to what we ask. So that whatever Conſiderations beſides might recommend us to his good Graces, this enforces all the reſt. He hath ſolemnly engaged himſelf to the Good Man, and made the anſwering his Requeſts a Debt. And He is not only Juſt, but Generous in his Payments; none of our Concerns lye dead in His Hands, and if the Returns be ſlow, it is only that they may be made at laſt with greater Intereſt. As the Goſpel furniſhes us no where with an Example of ſo many Repulſes, as this Woman of *Canaan* ſuffered, ſo does it rarely, if ever, ſet before us an Inſtance of ſo large a Commendation joyned with ſo Comprehenſive a Grant. In other caſes we meet with ſuch Anſwers as theſe, *Receive thy Sight*; *Thy Son liveth*; *I will come and Heal him*, and the like.

Luke xviii. 42.
John iv. 51.
Matt. viii 7.

But

But here the words reſemble thoſe of the Angel to *Jacob*, *Thou haſt Power with God, and with Man, and haſt prevailed.* Our Saviour ſeems to perſonate a Man conquered by ſome Superior Force, and to acknowledge that no Spoils can be too Rich for ſo gallant a Victory. The uſual way of Conſenting, it ſeems, was too narrow and too mean, and therefore he reſigns up himſelf to her Diſpoſal, and cries out with an Air of Ecſtaſie and Admiration, *Oh Woman! Great is thy Faith, Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.* Gen. xxxii. 28.

And that This is no Special Caſe, or Particular Privilege, but what every Devout Perſon hath a Right to expect, we are aſſured by that Parable in the Eleventh of St. *Luke*, made uſe of by our Saviour to encourage Earneſtneſs and Perſeverance in Prayer. For though the Friend there would not lend his Neighbour three Loaves, upon the account of any Kindneſs or Old Acquaintance that was betwixt them, yet *becauſe of his Importunity* (ſays the Text) he was content to riſe out of his Bed, and *give him as many as he had occaſion for.* The deſign whereof is to aſſure us, that even Asking it ſelf hath ſomething of Virtue, and much Efficacy in it. And ſurely we are then of all Creditors moſt Happy, when He, who in Marvellous Condeſcenſion, Luke xi. 8.

cenſion is pleaſed to call his Mercies our due, does not only pay us Uſe for them, while he keeps them in his Hands, but loves to be often called upon for Payment: Nay, puts our very Importunity into the Account alſo, when we preſs hard for that, which nothing but his own Free Grace could in any Senſe have made Ours.

2. *Secondly*, Another excellent Reaſon for God's Deferring to anſwer our Prayers, is, That he may by this means improve our Virtue, and illuſtrate it to the World, and ſo both make, and ſhew us in ſome good Degree fit, and worthy to receive the Bleſſings we Pray for. He deals with us as a Diſcreet and Tender Father, and ſutes the Methods of his Providence to our trueſt Advantage. Now, This is the Reformation of our bad Habits, Correcting the Perverſeneſs of our Diſpoſitions, and Conſulting which way we may beſt advance in Innocency and Goodneſs. Where a ready Condeſcenſion to our Requeſts, will conduce moſt to his Glory and our Good, he gives Readily and Liberally. Where an Abſolute Refuſal will contribute more to theſe great Ends, it is an Act of Love and Goodneſs, as well as an Inſtance of his Wiſdom to deny us. And where the Suſpending our Mercies

Mercies for a time will be moſt Beneficial, there we are put off till a more convenient day. Thus Almighty God proceeds always upon the ſame Principle, which we ought to go upon in reſpect of theſe Worldly Enjoyments. And that is, That Health and Sickneſs, Proſperity and Affliction, Succeſſes and Diſappointments, are but ſo many Inſtruments put into our Hand to do good with. That the moſt Valuable of them all, are yet then moſt truly and only Valuable, when they are made Occaſions of promoting our Virtue: And that even the moſt Diſtaſtful Accidents; when they better our Minds, become Bleſſings, exceeding great Bleſſings. Since then all theſe are but ſo many ſeveral ſorts of Diſcipline, and conſtantly intended either to amend, or to exerciſe us, we have no reaſon to Repine at the Means, provided they do but conduct us to the End that Sanctifies them. And ſince we are under the Care of One, who is Wiſer than We, and underſtands our Tempers, and our Neceſſities, much better than our ſelves do, let us leave it to Him to chooſe both his own Times, and his own Proportions, and be very Confident, that when We have done our Part, he will not fail to give, not only the Thing that is beſt, but in the Seaſon that is

beſt for us. Indulgent Parents know, and feel, and, when it is too late, repent the Miſchief of being too Eaſie to their Children. And therefore our Heavenly Father, who ſees the ill Effects of ſuch Indulgence, how Froward, and Peeviſh, and Inſolent we grow, when we are never croſs'd, cures this Fretful and Impatient Diſpoſition, by uſing us to ſtay a while; and checks the Eagerneſs of our Senſual Appetite, by withholding ſometimes what we want very much, and moſt paſſionately Deſire.

Now this is an Eaſineſs of Temper neceſſary to be attained by every Chriſtian, but attained it can never be, except by Practice and Experience. Where we find it in Perfection, it is a moſt Noble and Glorious Pattern for others to copy after; and therefore the Diſpenſations that employ it, are no leſs proper to exerciſe the Strong, than to confirm the Weak. Thus it was in our preſent Caſe: This Woman ſeems to have been admirably prepared, and of a Diſpoſition that needed no new Forming. And therefore our Saviour's Denials did not ſo much Increaſe or Occaſion her Virtue, as they called it forth, and provoked her to exert it. Had her firſt Petition been granted, ſhe had paſſed off in the common Crowd of Beggars, and we had never

never known more of her, but only that ſhe Asked, and that ſhe Received. But the Difficulties ſhe found in obtaining her Requeſt, and her Prudent Behaviour under them, did not only vindicate our Lord's Kindneſs to a Stranger, from all the Cavils of the Captious Jews; but have Immortalized her Name in Story, and rendred her a moſt Illuſtrious Example and Encouragement to Future Ages. An Example of all thoſe Graces, which muſt conſpire together to recommend our Prayers, and render them Succeſsful.

II. And this puts me in mind, that I ought to haſten to my Second Head, that ſo having vindicated the Goodneſs of God in ſometimes Delaying to grant, I may ſhew *what Qualifications are requiſite on our part, to make our Prayers at laſt Effectual, notwithſtanding and after ſuch Delays.*

Now thoſe which the Words, and this Relation, (for to It I confine my ſelf) give me occaſion to inſiſt upon at preſent, are Three, *viz.* *Fervency*, *Humility* and *Perſeverance.* For theſe are but ſo many Parts and Ingredients, whereof that *Faith* is compounded, which my Text ſo highly commends.

1. *First*, The *Fervency* of our Prayers is neceſſary to demonſtrate that we are in good Earneſt, and Seriouſly Deſirous of the things we ask for. Prayer is not the Buſineſs of the Tongue, nor of the Body, but of the Mind, and the Affections. And the God, whoſe Quality it is, *to underſtand the inward Parts*, as well as to *know every word in our Mouths*, will have but very little Reſpect to the Lips, or the Knee, if the Heart be wanting: That is, If the Supplications we prefer be Giddy and Unthinking, Languiſhing and Looſe. All the Vigour and Efficacy muſt come from within; thoſe Pure and Holy Flames, which a Juſt Reverence for God and his Adorable Excellencies, and a Feeling Reflection upon our own Wants, have kindled within us. Theſe will ſpread and exert themſelves, and actuate the whole Maſs in ſuch a manner, that every part ſhall conſpire by outward Signs, to expreſs the inward Devotion of our Souls. But when Men pretend to approach the Throne of Grace, and do it with Coldneſs and Indifference; when they come into the Court, and more Immediate Preſence of God, with Diſreſpect, and trifle with the King of Heaven; when Wandring Looks, and Irreverent Poſtures betray the diſtance of their Souls

Souls and Bodies, that they neither are together, nor conſider where they are, How can we expect Theſe Men ſhould ſucceed? Or if the Voice be loud, the Geſture moving, and yet the Mind ſome other way employed, this may be Oſtentation, but Zeal it is not; And the being ſeen of Men, and applauded by the Spectators, is all the Reward due to ſuch Prayers. For they are only Affectation and Pomp, and at the beſt a ſolemn Paſſion pretty well acted.

Thinkeſt thou then, O Man, that God will hear thee, when thou heareſt not thy own ſelf? Are Words, and Sounds, and empty Noiſe, of ſuch Worth, that they ſhould incline the Majeſty of Heaven, when even Men Scorn and Laugh at Forms, and things by Rote? And yet ſuch are all the Prayers of a roving and uncompoſed Mind. For without Attention, and Thought, and Serious Deſire, the Labour is only that of the Lip; and ſo much Air broken into Sound, without any Sence or Signification at all. Thou goeſt to publick Theatres, and there ſeeſt Spectacles Tragical and full of Horrour; Proſperous Villany, and Injured Innocence; Calamities, and Tortures, and Deaths, enough to Soften the Hardeſt Heart: Yet not one

one Tear falls, becauſe you know very well all this is but Shadow and Shew only. And art thou ſo Vain to ſuppoſe, that God will be moved with a *Scene* of Devotion, with an empty *Repreſentation* of a Prayer? Shall not He diſtinguiſh between Reality and Diſguiſe, but be ſo Profuſe, ſo Abſurd, to reward thy Counterfeit Addreſſes? Formality in Truth, is in ſome Reſpects worſe than Coldneſs: This neglects God, but That plainly Mocks and Affronts him. So impoſſible is it, that any outward Teſtimonies of Devotion, though never ſo Decent and Proper, ſhould be of any Value at all for their own Sakes. And for this reaſon, poſſibly, our Prayers are called in Scripture *a Sacrifice* and *an Incenſe*, becauſe they are rendred acceptable by the ſelf-ſame Methods that thoſe were wont to be. It is the Burning that creates the Sweet-ſmelling Savour, and it muſt be the Earneſtneſs and Warmth of our Prayers, that alone can make Them *come up as Incenſe* before the Throne of God.

2. The next Qualification requiſite in our Prayers is *Humility*, and of This we have many remarkable Inſtances in the Perſon before us. The ſlight our Saviour put upon her by his Silence, and the invidious Compariſon he made between

Verſe 24.

between the Jews and Her, the bitter Reproach of *Dog*, and the aggravating Circumſtances by which he expoſed her Unworthineſs; all which were ſo far from Provoking her, that ſhe received them all with Meekneſs, acknowledged the Truth of what he upbraided her with, and frames a freſh Argument even from that Confeſſion. In the Quality of *Dogs* ſhe is contented to be reckoned, if that would entitle her to a Dog's Portion; that Cure of her Daughter, which in compariſon of thoſe frequeut and mighty Miracles, wrought in the Country of the Jews, and for the Benefit of the *Children*, was but as *the Crums that fall from the Maſter's Table*. And herein we have a fair Copy ſet us, of thoſe mean and vile Opinions of our ſelves, with which the Majeſty of Heaven and Earth ſhould be approached. When Duſt and Aſhes, when a Creature Frail, and Poor, and Corruptible, is allowed the Privilege of attending a Glorious God, what Reſentments, what Behaviour can be reſpectful enough to expreſs the Infinite Diſtance! But eſpecially, when that Creature, ſo contemptible by Nature, hath yet debaſed it ſelf much worſe by Sin; when it is not only Poor and Low, but Polluted and Odious in his ſight. Oh! What Apprehenſions

Verſe 25. Verſe 26. Verſe 27.

of

of the Divine Favour can be agreeable to ſo Mighty, ſo Gracious a Condeſcenſion.

Acceſs indeed we have, and we are commanded to *come with Boldneſs to the Throne of Grace.* Heb. iv. 16. But it ſhould always be remembred, that it is a Throne of *Grace*, that the Seat of *Judgment* not any of us are able to ſtand before; That *Mercy* is the only thing we can pretend to, and that even This is in no degree due to us for our own Sakes, but purely upon the account of Another, who purchaſed it for us at the Price of his own Blood. That therefore we can have no Injury done us, becauſe of our ſelves we have no Right, no Deſert, no Claim to put in. That if we be paſſed by in Silence, or if we be Reproved and Check'd by the Sad Reproaches of our own Conſcience; All this is the Effect of our own Unworthineſs. If Others are preferred before Us, and enjoy larger Meaſures of the Divine Bleſſings, ſtill this is no Robbery to Us, nor any Juſt Occaſion to complain of a Partial and Unfair Providence. If we obtain our Petitions, this is indeed the Exceſs of Bounty. If we wait long, He is Maſter of his Favours, and *may do what he will with his own*; and we are to conſider, that our Buſineſs is to ask a Gift, and not to demand a Tribute.

So

So that every thing that may conduce to the laying us Low in our own Thoughts; every thing that may help to ſpeak our Modeſty, and Reverence, and Submiſſion, is all little enough for Wretches ſo Miſerable, ſo Unworthy as We. And there cannot be a greater Abſurdity, than to fly in the Face of God, and, like ſome Inſolent Beggars, not only *Grudge that we are not ſatisfied*, but Curſe and Revile the Hand that detains it from us. So did not the Mother in the Text. Inſtead of fancying her ſelf ill uſed ſhe bore all, and improved by all the Diſcouraging Arguments urged againſt her: She made her very Humility and Patience of Denial a new Incitement to ask again: And thus became moſt Eminent for the other Qualification requiſite in our Prayers, which, I told you, is

3. *Perſeverance.* How neceſſary a Duty this is, the very Terms in which our Saviour hath directed us to Pray, are of themſelves a plain and ſufficient Intimation. For he who bids us *Seek*, implies that we muſt not leave off Seeking till we have *Found:* And he who commands us to *Knock*, expects we ſhould continue at the Door till we are heard, and it *be opened* unto us. But beſides that, The Parable of the Father and the Son; of the Friend and his Neighbour in Diſtreſs for Proviſion to entertain his Gueſt; and Matt. vii. 7. Matt. vii. Luk. xi.

Luk. xviii. that other of the Widow and the Unjuſt Judge, all agree in the Neceſſity and the Efficacy of this Virtue. So that as St. *Chryſoſtom* ſomewhere Tom. 5. ſays, "We muſt not only ask, that we may re-"ceive; but we muſt ask for that very reaſon, "becauſe we do not receive; for we are often "denied, only that we ſhould ask again; and if "we receive not at laſt, it is not owing to any "Unwillingneſs in God, but to ſome Defect, "ſome Wearineſs, and Impatience of Mind in "our ſelves.

It were perhaps much more Uſeful and Seaſonable upon this occaſion to enquire, which way this Indefatigable Importunity comes to be ſo well accepted; When we find, that among Men nothing is more Troubleſom and Diſpleaſing. And the Difference ſeems to lye very much in This: That in God there is no End of Goodneſs, no End of Power, both which in Men are bounded within a narrow Compaſs. Too much Preſſing to Men is therefore Harſh and Ungraceful, becauſe this is obliquely to Reproach them; and taxes either their want of Inclination, or their want of Ability to gratifie us. But He who is Omnipotence and Love it ſelf, can be ſubject to no ſuch Reflections. Our Neceſſities can never exhauſt his Stores; and his Bowels are ſo Jer. xxxi. 28 tender, that he is ſaid to *Watch over Men to do them*

good

good; it is of his Bounty that all our Wants are ſupplied; and the very with-holding from us where they are not, is it ſelf an Act of Kindneſs. And Our perſiſting in Prayer argues that we think ſo. For when Men take it ill to be denied, they naturally grow Sullen, and diſdain to uſe any farther Intreaties. The ſame Boldneſs and Conſtancy which were Immodeſt and Blameable to a Creature, is therefore moſt Commendable in our Addreſſes to God: In this caſe it is not only conſiſtent with Modeſty, but the ſtrongeſt Evidence of it. For it ſpeaks us well Contented, and Eaſie, and of a Reſigned Spirit; it ſubmits to his Wiſdom, and confeſſes his Goodneſs and our Unworthineſs; when we will not ſuffer our ſelves to be prevailed upon by Sturdineſs and Deſpair; nor reſent theſe Repulſes with Anger and Pride; but are ſtill ſatisfied to repeat and reinforce our Requeſts, and to wait his own time and good Pleaſure for the accompliſhing our Deſires.

III. All that now remains to anſwer the Deſign of my Text, is to ſpeak ſomething very briefly to my Third and Laſt Head; wherein I promiſed to conſider, *How the Efficacy of Prayers thus Qualified*, as you have ſeen, *is Conſiſtent with the Standing Order of Providence, and the Unchangeableneſs of the Divine Nature and Counſels.*

Now by this Unchangeableneſs, we are to underſtand, that God can never alter, *i. e.* he cannot ceaſe to be what he is, nor be diverted from any of his Perfections, ſo as that he ſhould leave off to be Holy, and Juſt, and Good, and Wiſe, and the like; for That is his Nature, and *in it is no Variableneſs, neither Shadow of turning.* Nor can he Reverſe what he hath poſitively and abſolutely Decreed, or be falſe to any of his Promiſes; for theſe are his Counſels, and they *are Yea and Amen*, fix'd immutably, and ſtand faſt for Ever and Ever. But theſe Determinations do not reach ſo far, as to bind up every thing, and every accident in the Chains of a Fatal Neceſſity. He hath left many things at large to be the Rewards of Mens Virtue, or the Puniſhments of their Wickedneſs. Theſe are promiſed and threatned under certain Conditions, and as thoſe Conditions are fulfilled or neglected, the Promiſe or the Threatning takes place accordingly. So that for God, upon Mens Prayers and Repentance, to give what otherwiſe he would not have given; or to avert thoſe Judgments, which would certainly have overtaken them, if Theſe had not come in betwixt, and ſtop'd the Blow, is ſo far from Changing, that it is the greateſt Mark of Truth, and Conſtancy to his Word; the moſt exact way of obſerving thoſe Eternal Rules, which

James i. 17.

2 Cor. i. 20.

See Deut. xxviii. Iſa. i. 19. 20.

Exod. xxxii. 11.——14. Pſal. cvi. 23.——30.

Jerem. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10.

which his Wiſdom and Providence hath all along formed and preſcribed to it ſelf; the propereſt Accompliſhment of thoſe Revelations made to Mankind in Scripture for their Encouragement, and which he hath there inviolably engaged always to govern the World by. Ezek. xxxiii. 13, 14, 15, 16.

There is indeed a Temper in Men, that affects to be courted, and flattered, and fawned upon; and complies with the Requeſts of others out of mean and little Ends. But this is the Effect of Pride, and Paſſion, and Intereſt; much different from thoſe Condeſcenſions of Almighty God, who, though he cannot be ſubject either to Weakneſs or Corruption, may yet be prevailed upon by ſuch Methods, as becomes a Reaſonable, and Wiſe, and Generous Mind. And therefore, when Men pay the Homage due to his Infinite Majeſty; when they throw themſelves entirely upon his Goodneſs, *caſt all their Care upon him*, *commit their Souls*, and all their Concerns, *into his Hands*, and that with ſuch Reverent and Strong Perſwaſions of his being a *Faithful Creator*, that no Delays, no Refuſals can tempt them to ſuſpect or diſtruſt him: This is ſuch an Argument to help and favour People in Diſtreſs, as every Great Spirit, every Man of Honour and common Good Nature, would think it a Fault to hold out againſt. So that for God to ſhew himſelf flexible upon ſuch Occaſions,

cannot

cannot in reaſon be charged with Fickleneſs or Levity, but is a Gracious Compliance upon Juſt and Reaſonable Motives. And to harden himſelf againſt the continued Cries and Complaints of Suitors thus qualified, would much more miſbecome the Character of Sovereign Judge, and Infinitely Good Ruler of the whole World.

To conclude then in one Word. You ſee that it is impoſſible for Men to Pray in vain, provided they do but Pray as they ought; That (as the Collect for this Day inſinuates) *God is our Refuge and Strength, always ready to hear the Devout Prayers of his Church, and that they who ask Faithfully, will not fail to obtain Effectually.* Nay, that when he ſeems Deaf to all our Applications, his Mercy is even then providing ſome better thing for us; and that the ſloweſt Grants are uſually the moſt Plentiful and Advantagious at laſt. And, if the very Denial, if the very Delay of our Prayers be for our Benefit, Where can we poſſibly find any Objection to diſcourage us in this Duty?

23d Sunday after Trinity.

Let us come then, my Brethren, to the Throne of Grace, but let us come full of Holy Zeal, and Humble Modeſty, and Unſhaken Perſeverance. Let us lay Siege, as it were, and make a cloſe Purſuit upon this Saviour of the World. He only hides his Face for a Seaſon, to make

us

us more Diligent and Eager in the Search of him:

Et fugit ad ſalices, & ſe cupit ante videri.

He withdraws himſelf from our firſt Aſſaults, that we may renew the Attack with more Vigour, and loves to have what he delights to give ſeemingly forced out of his Hands. Let us then beſet him every where, attempt him in Publick and in Private, in the Congregation, in our Families, in our Cloſets, in our Beds; for This is a Holy Violence, and ought to be committed. This is the only Combat, for which no Time, no Place can be Unſeaſonable; and it is the only one too, in which we are ſure of Victory at laſt, if we do but continue Wreſtling, and not let go our hold.

And Reaſon ſure there is for all our Vehemence, when the Succeſs is of ſuch Conſequence to us. For though Our Children be not Lunatick, yet we need a Cure no leſs Miraculous, than this Woman in the Text did; and that for a Relation, which ought to be much more Dear and Tender to us. For, alas! our Souls are *grievouſly vexed with a Devil*, yea with a Legion of Devils; wild unruly Paſſions, and Exorbitant Luſts, that rend, and tear, and torment us. This

Poſſeſſion

Poſſeſſion is much too ſtrong to recover our ſelves from; nothing leſs than the Almighty Word of our only Saviour can releaſe and reſtore us. To Him therefore we muſt come, "Even "to Thee, O Bleſſed Jeſus! O caſt us not off "utterly, but bring us back to our right Mind. "We are not indeed worthy to be called thy "*Children*, yet in Pity, O Gracious *Maſter*, diſ- "dain not to *feed us with the Crums that fall from* "*thy Table*. We would only, that thou vouch- "ſafe to Heal, and to Pardon; *Mercy*, *Mercy* is "our only Cry, *Have Mercy on us thou Son of* "David. Say but Thou to our Diſtempered "Souls, *Be it unto You, even as you will*, and *we* "*ſhall be made whole from this very hour*. Amen

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